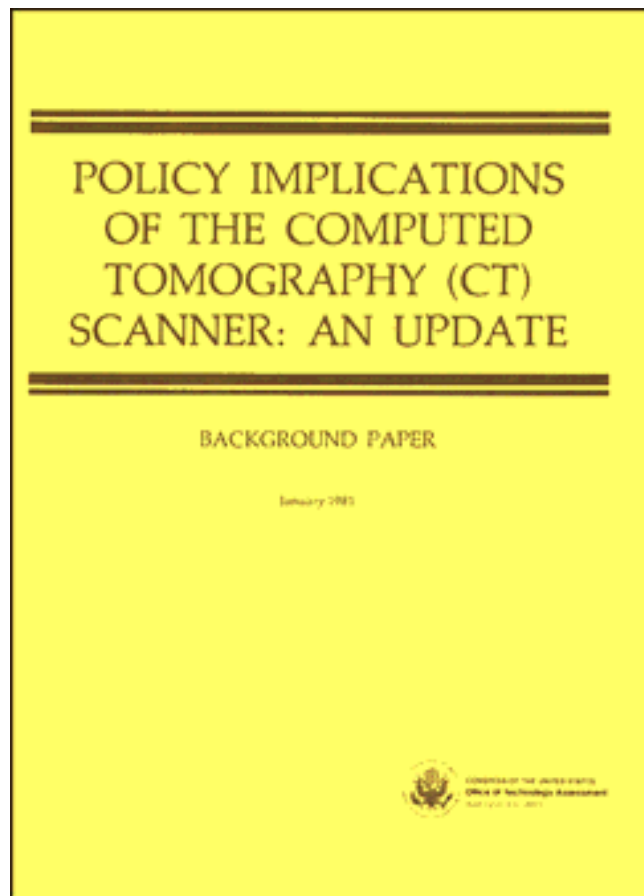


*Policy Implications of the Computed
Tomography (CT) Scanner: An Update*

January 1981

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Foreword

In August 1978, OTA published a report called *Policy Implications of the Computed Tomography (CT) Scanner*. The report has generated much interest in both the CT scanner itself and Federal policies aimed at rationalizing its diffusion and use. During the summer of 1979, OTA staff reviewed the status of policies concerning the scanner and found that they were very much in the process of change. A number of staff of congressional committees (especially the Senate Committee on Finance, which had requested the original study) expressed interest in an update of material in the original report. In addition, OTA continued to be consulted by outside organizations and groups, including Federal and State government agencies, on implications of CT scanners. For these reasons, OTA decided to update the 1978 report.


This paper does not repeat material in the original report. For the most part, it is assumed that the reader is familiar with the 1978 report. Thus, basic descriptions of the scanner and of certain Federal laws and policies are found in the earlier report.

As part of this paper, OTA has updated its list of operational CT scanners. The OTA list apparently continues to be the most complete and reliable inventory of scanners. An analysis of data from the list is presented in chapter 2.

This paper considers the CT scanner in the context of the entire field of what has come to be called "diagnostic imaging" (making pictures of the inside of the human body for the purposes of diagnosis). A number of new applications of existing technologies as well as several new technologies have developed. The field of diagnostic imaging is developing rapidly, and presents a significant challenge to policy makers. Can the relative advantages of the different technologies be demonstrated? Can Federal policies rationalize the use of the many technologies? Or will the new technologies merely be added on to the existing methods, driving up costs and contributing only a small marginal benefit to people's health?

Since this is a background paper, no policy options are presented. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the most important development concerning CT scanners that have occurred over the past 21/2 years. However, since the policy options of the 1978 report seem generally valid, they are reprinted in appendix A.

Drafts of the final paper were reviewed by the Health Program Advisory Committee chaired by Dr. Sidney Lee and by a number of other individuals and groups representing manufacturers, radiologists, and Federal agencies (see app. I). We are grateful for their assistance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John H. Gibbons". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "J" and "G".

JOHN H. GIBBONS
Director

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